

## Testimony in Support of DPH Funding for Gun Violence Prevention

February 22, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, ranking members Miner and France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Aileen Brill and I live in Westport. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport (the “Council”) and a member of the Council’s Advocacy Committee.

The Council is a faith-based, non-sectarian social services agency dedicated to meeting the needs of people at risk and breaking the cycle of poverty and crisis in the Greater Bridgeport area. We have witnessed the devastation wrought by the ongoing threat of violence in Bridgeport. Getting guns off the street is a first step. To that end, the Council partnered with the Bridgeport Police Department in 2021 and carried out two successful gun buybacks. During these events, we also distributed free gun locks and gun safes in an effort to promote awareness of the laws requiring safe storage of firearms in Connecticut. The gun buybacks were funded by the Council, member congregations and private donors who share our passion to make Bridgeport a safe community where families can thrive.

Getting guns off the street is only one component of a comprehensive approach to reducing urban gun violence. Intervention programs are critical to diffusing a crisis and restoring a safe and healthy society. Moreover, a permanent Office of Gun Violence Prevention at the state level is needed to address this public health crisis.

**For these reasons, I submit this testimony in support of the \$3.6 million included in Governor Lamont’s budget adjustment bill for the Department of Public Health to fund gun violence prevention programs.**

We cannot break the cycle of poverty and achieve racial justice if children are not brought up in communities where they can thrive. That is why I’m also asking you to support the establishment of a state-level Office of Gun Violence Prevention. This office would deliver reliable funding to other types of community-based gun violence prevention programs like Project Longevity in Bridgeport. According to the Giffords Law Center, gun violence is estimated to directly cost Connecticut taxpayers at least \$90 million annually. Failing to address the cause of this staggering expense is fiscally irresponsible. Investing more in community-based violence prevention programs would not only save lives and reduce the trauma inflicted on these communities, it would save taxpayer money.

I commend Governor Lamont for proposing \$3.6 million to fund community gun violence programs. However, I urge the legislature to do more given the budget surplus and the \$6.3 billion received by the federal American Rescue Plan Act. Last year gun homicides were the highest in 25 years, nearly double the level in 2018. Gun violence is an urgent public health crisis that demands the state invest more to save lives.

Sincerely,

Aileen Brill  
Westport, CT

Cc: Senator Will Haskell, Representative Jonathan Steinberg